

December 12, 2005

Dear Coastal Dungeness Crab Fisher:

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of the regulations that will apply to the 2005-2006 coastal commercial Dungeness crab season in the waters adjacent to the Washington coast. It is very important that you fully inform yourself with the regulations before you begin fishing. The management of this year's fishery will again have three special management areas that will be reserved for tribal fishers for certain periods of time, described below. In addition, you will need to purchase and use pot buoy tags.

Crab Condition Testing Results

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife conducted crab condition tests beginning the third week of October. We modified the depths where test pots were deployed to include test stations in 45 fathoms; previously, the deepest test station was 30 fathoms. There were two rounds of tests in the stations off of Grays Harbor and Cape Shoalwater, and three rounds in the stations off the Columbia River and Long Beach. The final test results from the Grays Harbor and Cape Shoalwater stations, on November 17, yielded a meat pick-out rate of 22.1%. The third round of testing conducted for the Long Beach and Columbia River areas, on December 5, yielded a meat recovery rate of 22.3%. Results from domoic acid testing for all areas came back as low as non-detectable.

Opening Date

Policy representatives from the California Department of Fish and Game, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife have been tracking the results of crab condition testing from all three states in recent weeks and discussing an opening strategy given that none of the three states' test results indicated attainment of the minimum meat recovery rates needed for a December 1 opener. After the second round of test fishing in mid-November indicated there were pockets of soft crab from southern Washington to northern California, the policy representatives agreed to announce that the season opening would not occur before December 15 from Point Arena to the U.S.–Canada border. The representatives agreed that additional testing was necessary, in areas with the lowest meat recovery, before a season opening date could be determined. At the same time, they committed to work together to coordinate coastwide opening dates that would promote a fair start for all crab fishers.

On December 8, the three state policy representatives held a conference call to discuss the results of additional testing in Washington, Oregon, and California. Based on the results of the tests that indicated the continued presence of areas of poor quality crab, the three states agreed to extend the season opening delay through December 30 and **open the waters from Point Arena, California, to the U.S.-Canada border at 12:01 a.m. on December 31, 2005.** Washington and Oregon will each provide its fishers with a 64-hour gear setting opportunity that will begin at 8:00 a.m. on December 28, 2005.

The Quileute Tribe has filed an objection with the federal court regarding the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's intent to open its fishery prior to January 15, 2006. Until this issue is resolved, the opening of the coastal commercial crab fishery will not apply to the area from Destruction Island (47°40.50 N.) to Sandpoint (48°07.00 N).

Hold Inspections

Hold inspections will be conducted in Washington's coastal port on December 30, 2005. You must have a valid hold inspection certificate before delivering crab into any Washington port prior to February 1, 2006.

Special Area Management (SMA) Restrictions

The following area closures will be in place for the 2005-2006 coastal Dungeness crab season to meet the state of Washington's harvest sharing obligations to the Washington coastal treaty Indian tribes.

Makah: The Dungeness crab fishery will be closed beginning January 28, 2006, through March 28, 2006, in the coastal waters between 48°02.15 N. to 48°20.00 N., and east of a line connecting those points approximating the 25-fathom line. The SMA is described as the marine waters within the following points:

- Northeast Corner; Tatoosh Island
- Northwest Corner; 48°20.00 N. - 124°50.45 W.
- Southwest Corner; 48°02.15 N. - 124°50.45 W.
- Southeast Corner; 48°02.15 N. - 124°41.00 W.

Quinalt: A primary SMA will be established to include the coastal waters shoreward of a line approximating the 25-fathom depth curve between Raft River (47°28.00) and Copalis River (47°08.00). This area will remain closed until February 28, 2006.

- Northeast Corner; 47°28.00 N. - 124°20.70 W.
- Northwest Corner; 47°28.00 N. - 124°33.00 W.
- Southwest Corner; 47°08.00 N. - 124°23.50 W.
- Southeast Corner; 47°08.00 N. - 124°11.20 W.

A secondary SMA will be established to include the area shoreward of a line approximating the 25-fathom depth curve between the mouth of the Copalis River and the mouth of the Quinault River. This area will be closed from the time the primary SMA closure concludes until further notice. This SMA will be described as the marine waters within the following points:

- Northeast Corner; Quinault River 47°21.00 N. - 124°18.00
- Northwest Corner; 47°21.00 N. - 124°29.75
- Southwest Corner; 47°08.00 N. - 124°23.50
- Southeast Corner; 47°08.00 N. - 124°11.20

In addition, through April 30, 2006, there will be a 100-pot limit in the area shoreward of 25 fathoms from Raft River to Copalis River and a requirement for you to pre-register with the Department before fishing in this area. You will receive a separate notice prior to February 28, 2006, that will provide the details for fishing in this area once it opens to state fishers.

Quileute: The state fishery will be closed until April 30, 2006, in the area from Cape Johnson to Destruction Island shoreward of a line approximating 30 fathoms. This SMA will be described as the marine waters within the following points:

- Northeast Corner; Cape Johnson 47°58.00 - 124°40.40
- Northwest Corner; 47°58.00 N. - 124°49.00 W.
- Southwest Corner; 47°40.50 - 124°40.00 W.
- Southeast Corner; Destruction Island 47°40.50 - 124°24.43

In addition, from May 1, 2006, through May 31, 2006, there will be a 100-pot limit in this SMA. License holders must register with the Department prior to deploying gear in this area. You will receive a notice prior to May 1, 2006, that will provide details for fishing in this area once it opens to state fishers.

Once again, the pre-season period has been filled with management challenges for the fleet and the Department. I am pleased that we were able to achieve a coastwide opener for most of the state and for you to be able to provide a high quality product to the consumer. Have a safe and prosperous season.

Sincerely,

Philip Anderson, Special Assistant

cc: Jeff Koenings, Larry Peck, Heather Reed